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# Spindle City Historic Society

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Volume 8 Issue 1

Spring 2005

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## DID YOU KNOW

...that Theodore Judah and the American railroad matured together? As a boy, Judah studied civil engineering at RPI. By 18 he was a railroad surveyor. One of his first jobs in the early 1840s was surveying the Troy and Schenectady railroad through Cohoes. He later went on to fame as the surveyor of the first transcontinental railroad in the United States, the Union Pacific.

...that there is a spring behind the Van Schaick School, not far from the Intermediate Baseball field? The spring was long visited by many for drinking water.

...that Public School #5 was on the corner of Masten Avenue and Elm St.?

...that the Troy and Schenectady Railroad, built through Cohoes in the early 1840s, was the 3rd oldest railroad in New York State? It was also the first railroad on the Hudson River to Lake Erie crossing to use all-iron rail. Earlier railroads used wooden rails topped with thin iron straps.

...that there was an organization in Cohoes called the Friendly Society of the Sons of Scotia? Its members were emigrants from Scotland and those of Scottish ancestry, who wished to “keep alive the love and sweet remembrances of Caledonia.” Organized in February 1869, the group eventually grew to eighty members, and included funeral benefits as one of the perquisites of membership.

...that railroads in the early 1840s had no telegraph or signal system, no air brakes for controlling fast and heavy trains, and no dining cars? Lack of diners meant that travelers had to scramble to seek food at station restaurants during stops to pick up or discharge passengers.

...that the Spindle City Historic Society has a new website? We will still maintain our address at the *Times-Union*, but you can also visit our new site, with many exciting features, at [www.spindlecit.org](http://www.spindlecit.org).

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

The Spindle City Historic Society welcomes new members *Joseph Genest, Larry Kavanaugh, Cathal Kennedy, and the Ralph Schrader family.*

## HISTORIAN'S NOTEBOOK

### Little City of Bridges

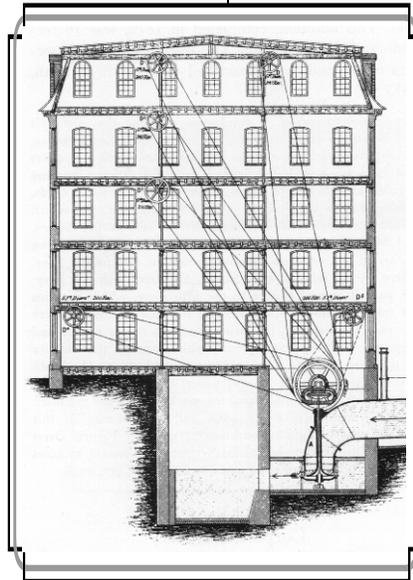
The late 19<sup>th</sup> century found Cohoes at its industrial peak, still dependent upon the Mohawk River to run the major portion of its mill machinery. Over the years, the northern end of what is the city proper had been divided into a network of canals and raceways that transformed it into a group of little artificial islands. Bridges of all types and descriptions were necessary to carry on the daily routines of work and leisure, becoming an accepted part of the landscape. According to an 1891 map I recently examined, at least 36 bridges were delineated, not including earlier “stone arches” built at street intersections over the power canals. The latter were later included in the network of underground tunnels. The first bridge built across the river to Waterford was constructed in 1795. Many have replaced it, with the last being dedicated in 1933.

Early in the industrial period, before the power canal network was completed, a large ravine, formed over the ages by water runoff, traversed the ground over what is now lower Garner, cutting across Sargent St. to Ontario, then from Ontario across the new Silliman Park, across Seneca, Oneida, Mohawk and then to the Mohawk River. Initially two planks were used as a bridge across the ravine at the present-day intersection of Remsen and Ontario Streets. Soon a “stone arch” replaced them at that spot. During excavations for the Hudson River Bank & Trust building on Mohawk Street, the original stone arches at Seneca and Oneida saw daylight, if ever so briefly, once again.

Footbridges across the power canals, a step up from planks, were in many cases dangerous at night and during inclement weather. Another bad habit at night was using the Erie Canal lock gates as a shortcut. Many times an unsuccessful crossing resulted in drowning. The more secure State bridges over the canals became highly beneficial conduits opening up the hill for development during the housing crunch in the 1870s.

The replacement of bridges has continued with the recent 112<sup>th</sup> Street bridge; soon a new structure will dress up Bridge Avenue. Today none of those 1890 bridges remain, but they did linger on well into the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century. How many of us remember crossing one of those old-timers before the space they bridged was filled in with earth?

Walter Lipka



## The Yorkers

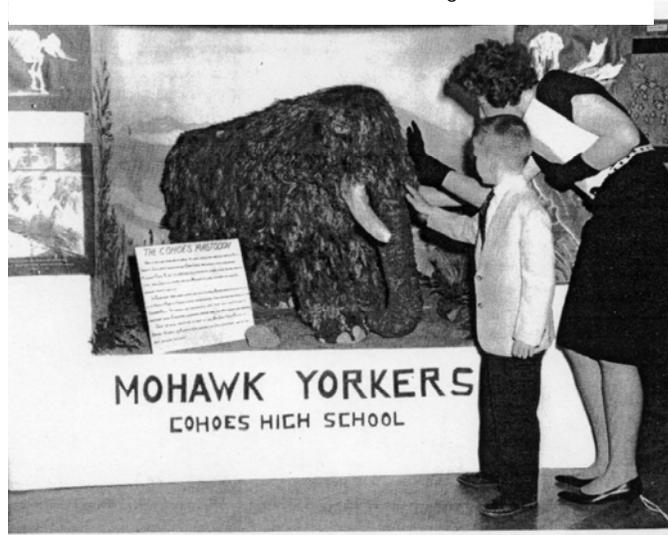
For more than one hundred years, the New York State Historical Association has collected, exhibited, and published the state's history for teachers and students. An organization called the Yorkers was established so that high school and middle school students could study and appreciate local, state, and national history as junior members of the New York State Historical Association. Thousands of students throughout the state have over the years learned that history can be fun! Some of those students were Cohoesiers, and this is a bit of their history.

In 1960, under the sponsorship of Mrs. Warren Kelly, the first children's historical group was established in Cohoes. As members of the Mohawk Yorkers, students took field trips to historic sites, and raised funds for restoration projects such as refurbishing historical markers. Annual conferences of Yorker chapters from around the state were held in Syracuse. Events included exhibits created by the students. In 1962, Cohoes High School English teacher Miriam Biskin suggested that the students design a replica of the Cohoes Mastodon. The students were quite enthusiastic about the idea, and, assisted by Mrs. Kelly, soon set to work gathering chicken wire and papier mache materials and researching details from the New York State Museum about the Ice Age creature. After the body was constructed, the "hair", made of frayed and cut sisal dyed three shades of brown, was attached to the mastodon with papier mache strips. Thus covered, he was given the moniker "Hairy." His look was completed with blue glass eyes donated for the project. The students also constructed a background for display and support, and then they and Hairy were off on the bus to Syracuse for the 1963 convention. The mastodon model proved to be the star of the gathering, and the Cohoes High School Yorkers received a well-deserved first place prize in the exhibit competition.

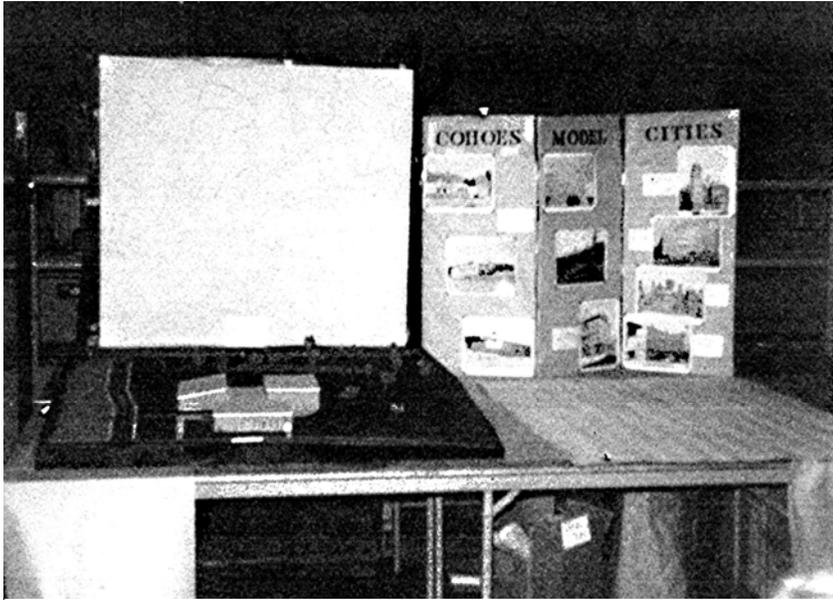


*Pat Manley, Gregory Stroyen, and Tony Welcome help create the mastodon model for the Yorkers exhibit at the 1963 state convention.*

*The award-winning mastodon on display. Paula Parsley of the Yorkers is on the right.*



Cohoes students continued to be active in the Yorkers, and at the 1967 Yorker Convention they received the first Community Service Award given by the NYS Historical Association for their work in restoring the Van Schaick Cemetery. To accomplish the work, they raised \$3000 through bake sales, car washes, and by soliciting donations from local businesses and residents. They also won a special award for their creation of the pamphlet "The Van Schaick Story" and were the sole recipients of an achievement award for 5 years of outstanding work on state, local, and district levels. Four of the Cohoes students won high honors, and Joseph Barbera, President of the Mohawk Yorkers, was selected for Who's Who Among Yorkers, one of only 20 students so honored annually from a membership of 10,000. In 1968, another Cohoes High student, Michael Santarcangelo, was chosen for Who's Who Among Yorkers and received a statuette awarded to outstanding members. In the same year, a middle school Yorkers division was established for Cohoes students under the co-sponsorship of Mrs. Kelly, who was honored for her decade of dedication to the group. The level of involvement of Cohoes students in the Yorkers was evident from these successes; in addition, all district officers elected that year were from Cohoes schools – President Michael Santarcangelo and officers James Everston, Denise White, and Christine Joliceur were from Cohoes High, and Gary Paulzak was from Keveny.



*The Keveny Yorkers exhibit, with a model of the Cohoes Community Center and a poster on the Model Cities Program. The Community Center model won first prize at the 1971 Yorkers state convention.*

In the perennial friendly rivalry between Keveny and Cohoes High, the Keveny Academy chapter of Yorkers was quite active as well, boasting 137 members in 1965. Keveny Senior John Souter was also elected to Who's Who Among Yorkers in 1967, following his five years of active participation and leadership. Keveny students constructed a scale model of the Watervliet Arsenal (assembled in the basement of St. Bernard's Church), for which they received a first-place award at the 1968 Yorker Convention. In 1971, the students created a replica of the Cohoes Community Center, which also earned top prize at the annual convention. It was later on display in Cohoes City Hall for an extended time.

Students from Keveny also participated in Yorker-sponsored essay contests. Among the contributions were "A Nation's Needs" on Chester A. Arthur, "The Wanderer" – a

Herman Melville story, and "Cohoes: A Falls, a Legend, a City", all by Daniel Campbell; "A Saga of Streets" on early Cohoes street development, by Carol Ann Abbott; "The First Fifty Years of My Community – Cohoes", by Sharon McOmber; "Home of the Harmony Mills" by Linda Scattergood; and "I Live in a House of History" about the Pruyn homestead in Mechanicville, by William Gray. Essays submitted by Cohoes High students included: "This Was the Man Who Was – Hugh White" by Craig Holbrook; "Clinton's Wisdom", a story of the Erie Canal, by Jo Ann Derocher; "Cohoes Falls as Seen by an Irish Poet" by Lynne Crable; and, "Dear Caty" - concerning the correspondence between Catherine Van Schaick and Colonel Peter Gansevoort, by April Kennedy (now president of the Cohoes Common Council, who continues today in her longstanding enthusiasm for Cohoes history). The Van Schaick – Gansevoort romance was recently recalled in a January 15, 2005 reenactment of their January 1778 wedding at the Van Schaick Mansion. Also among Cohoes High essayists was Anne Biskin, who authored "The Diary of a House", about the Van Schaick Mansion, "The Female Messiah of Niskayuna" about Ann Lee, founder of the Shakers, "Up and Down the Ladder", the story of Eva Tanguay, and her 1965 contest-winning essay "First Martyr of the Civil War", about Elmer Ellsworth.

The students who participated in the Yorkers had terrific experiences working together, learning and traveling. They developed many skills to benefit them throughout their lives, and for some it fostered a lifelong interest in history. Unfortunately, after this period of intense activity in the 1960s and early 1970s, student participation in the Yorkers waned, and there are no longer chapters of the organization in Cohoes. However, student activity and interest in Cohoes continues in other forms, most recently with the participation of Cohoes Middle School students in the "My Hometown" Contest, sponsored by Time-Warner Cable and the Travel Channel, in which students developed a television script promoting their hometown. Throughout October 2004, the students participated in learning activities to familiarize them with the characteristics of their community, and worked online with a Travel Channel producer to develop the ideas for their script. The scripts they developed were evaluated by a panel of judges. Cohoes Middle School, with 109 student participants, had four contest winners, Kimberly Cestaro, Jenna Elizabeth Deo, Maggie Grimmick, and Clarissa Ott, and 20 student finalists. We hope that this spirit of enthusiasm for their home town and its history endures.

*Thanks to Stephanie Stroyen (Cohoes High, Class of 1964), Catherine Riggs Clairmont (Keveny, Class of 1972) and Don Clairmont (Keveny, Class of 1971) for their contributions to this article.*



## Off the Top...

“Through this land runs an excellent river about five hundred or six hundred paces wide. ... [I]t flows between two high rocky banks, and falls from a height equal to that of a church, ... with such a noise that we could hardly hear one another, but the water boiling and dashing with such force in still weather, that it was all the time as if it were raining. The water is as clear as crystal and as fresh as milk. I and another with me saw there in clear sunshine, when there was not a cloud in the sky, as we stood above upon the rocks, directly opposite where the river falls in a great abyss, the half of a rainbow, or a quarter circle of the same color with the rainbow in the sky. In this river is great plenty of several kinds of fish, pike, eels, perch, lampreys, suckers, cat fish, sun fish, shad, bass, etc. In the spring, in May, the perch are so plenty that one man with a hook and line can catch in one hour as many as ten or twelve can eat. In this river, too, are very beautiful islands,” says Rev. Johannes Megapolensis in 1642 of the Cohoes Falls according to Arthur H. Masten’s *History of Cohoes*.

With the arrival of spring, the roar and beauty of the falls will be shared with us once again, just as it has been observed and illustrated so many times over the past three centuries in countless images. The falls have run ceaselessly in Cohoes, yet the area around it has changed dramatically from the times when the Mastodont roamed the area, the Indians enjoyed bountiful hunting grounds, the water powered the mills, to the City as it is today. It is our charge to preserve and share these wonders and changes with time. That charge can be carried out in many ways. Simply take notice of the falls, the mills, and other aspects of the city’s history. Document and label those old photos, share the old letters and printed materials. Get active, come and join the Spindle City Historic Society. Attend one of our meetings or events. Too busy to do that? Then why not simply share something with us?

Many Cohoesiers (and non-Cohoesiers) have been bringing us photographs, memorabilia and artifacts for donation and display and our collection is growing. The SCHS is appreciative of these wonderful contributions – please keep them coming. Our regular meetings are the last Wednesday of the month at 7 PM in the Cohoes Visitor’s Center at 58 Remsen Street (the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the historic Cohoes Music Hall). We hope to see each one of you at a meeting or presentation. Let’s keep Cohoes’ memories and history alive.

Paul D. Dunleavy  
President

## Trustees’ Meeting and Holiday Gathering

On January 7, SCHS trustees gathered for a meeting and holiday get-together at the home of June and Walter Cherniak. Along with great food and holiday merriment, the trustees held discussions of the society’s upcoming events, ongoing projects, and goals for the future. If you’d like to join in the festivities next time, let us know. SCHS is always looking for additional members who wish to become more active in the organization and serve as trustees.



*SCHS trustees Bernie Ouimet, Walter Lipka, and Walter Cherniak in discussion with President Paul Dunleavy and First Vice President Linda Christopher.*

## Do You Remember These?

As you may know, SCHS is working on its second book for the Arcadia Press “Images of America” series. We’ve gotten some terrific photographs from many people and stories to go with them, but there are a few areas in which we could use a bit more information. If you have memories, or knowledge of the history (or know someone else who does) of the following, please let us know.

- ☞ Beau Knit Factory
- ☞ Eagle Athletic Club
- ☞ Home Telephone Company
- ☞ Ford’s Park
- ☞ Lavigne’s Tavern
- ☞ Gracette Manufacturing Company
- ☞ Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> Club
- ☞ Drescall’s Store
- ☞ Polish Citizens’ Association
- ☞ Polish National Alliance
- ☞ Ice harvesting/ice houses in Cohoes
- ☞ Cohoes Power & Light Company athletic teams

Contact us by e-mail at [cherniak@nycap.rr.com](mailto:cherniak@nycap.rr.com) or phone 237-5618 if you have information to share.

## “Paintings of Cohoes”

December 11 was the opening reception for “Paintings of Cohoes”, an exhibit of watercolors by John Connors depicting Cohoes sites and scenes. Subjects included the Music Hall, City Hall, Harmony Mill #3, the Falls, and views of city streets and bridges.



Mr. Connors, whose recent show “Troy, Oh Boy” was exhibited in the Troy Visitor’s Center, has also shown his work in numerous galleries in New York City. During his career, he has had several murals commissioned, and studied in Japan in the 1980s, where he learned the art of Sumi-e brush painting. He has taught brush painting, watercolor painting, and drawing classes both in New York City and in the Capital District region.

The exhibit was up in the Visitor’s Center through February.



*The evening also featured the awarding of a handmade Cohoes quilt, the prize for the 2004 SCHS annual raffle, to Barbara McDonald (center, with quilt). SCHS raffle coordinator Lorraine Okeson is on the right. Barbara has very generously offered to hang the quilt in the Visitor’s Center, where it can be viewed and enjoyed by all.*



*Artist John Connors (center) converses with a visitor at the exhibit.*

## “Introducing Adelaide” at Diamond Ridge



On January 9, famed dancer Adelaide Dickey was again on the road, this time for an appearance at the Diamond Ridge retirement community in Troy. Paul Dunleavy (with technical assistance from Tor Shekerjian) presented the “Introducing Adelaide” program he created about this notable Cohoesier, which made its debut last June. The presentation featured some new information about Adelaide recently uncovered at the Lincoln Center archives. The program, with images of Adelaide (shown above with dance partner and husband J.J. Hughes), music, and vivid descriptions of Adelaide’s performances, colorful character, and eventful life, was greatly enjoyed by Diamond Ridge residents. Look for another visit from Adelaide later in the year.



## **Paul Stanley Frament – A World War II Hero from Cohoes**

*One of the “Did you know’s” in last summer’s issue of our newsletter noted that the USS Frament was named for a Cohoesier, Paul Stanley Frament. Here is his story.*

Paul Stanley Frament was born in 1919 at 106 Hudson Avenue on Van Schaick Island to Laura and Edward Frament. Paul attended Sacred Heart School and Keveny Memorial Academy, and went on to study at the Albany College of Pharmacy. During his college years, and after his graduation in June 1939, he worked at DeGuire’s Pharmacy.

Frament enlisted in the U.S. Navy following the attack of Pearl Harbor, reporting for training in January 1942 as a Pharmacist’s Mate. The Navy provided a number of support services to the Marines, and he received his posting for the invasion of the Solomon Islands to the First Marine Division. The first invasion landed on Guadalcanal on August 7, 1942, and as a Pharmacist’s

Mate third class he was engaged in action, where, surrounded by Japanese snipers, he tended the wounded. In November, as he continued to aid his fellow soldiers, he was knocked unconscious by a nearby explosion and was evacuated to the rear, away from action. On the following morning, he secured his own release and returned to his unit to care for the injured until he was evacuated again due to exhaustion. Two days later he was wounded by naval gunfire and died of these wounds on November 19, 1942. He was not yet twenty-five.

Frament was posthumously awarded the Silver Star for bravery, and the Navy announced that a new destroyer escort DE-677, then under construction in Quincy, Massachusetts, would be named the *USS Frament*. On August 15, 1943 the ship was commissioned by his mother in New York City. Paul Frament, one of the most highly-decorated pharmacists in the U.S. Navy, is buried in St. Joseph’s Cemetery in Waterford.



**The USS Frament**

*Thanks to Charles Valenti for bringing this story to our attention. We are grateful to Jeannette Molloy, Paul Frament’s sister, who shared this history, and to Dennis P. Worthen, scholar in residence at the Lloyd Library in Cincinnati, for his research and writing on Paul Frament.*

## A Civil War Relic

Thomas S. O'Dea of 15 Broadway, Cohoes, a member of Post NG Lyon GAR, a private in Company E, Sixteenth Regiment, Maine Infantry Volunteers in the Civil War, spent a week near the site of the infamous Andersonville prison at Fort Sumter, Georgia, where he had been imprisoned during the war. While on this 1914 visit, he discovered a button from the uniform of a Northern soldier, in splendid condition despite fifty years in ground that had been plowed and planted many times over. At one time the prison contained 35,000 Northern soldiers, where thousands died from the inhumane treatment received there. Counting paces from the north and east sides of the former stockade walls, the site of the tent that the veteran once occupied was found. Mr. O'Dea drew from memory a picture of the prison and its attending scenes which hung on a wall of a building erected on a part of the prison site by the Women's Relief Corps of the United States, acquired by them because of its historic significance. Southerners so strongly objected to the terrible scenes accurately depicted by the artist that it became necessary to remove the pictures (whereabouts unknown). Mr. O'Dea also rediscovered Providence Spring, a little fountain of water named by the prisoners because it suddenly appeared from the ground without being dug, and provided a blessed relief to the prisoners.



Birdseye view of Andersonville prison from southeast corner

*Thanks to SCHS member Donald Cosgro of Plattsburgh for sending along the article that appeared in the May 14, 1914 Cohoes Republican newspaper from which this was adapted. The Andersonville image to the left is from the National Park Service.*

*Editor's note: Conditions for prisoners at Andersonville were considered the worst of any prison during the Civil War. The prison provided little in the way of housing, clothing, or medical care for the captured Union soldiers. The 26-acre compound, intended to hold 10,000 prisoners, contained well over 30,000 by August 1864. The Georgia heat, along with disease, poor sanitation, and lack of adequate food, housing, and medical care, took an enormous toll. Nearly one-third of the prisoners interned at Andersonville died.*

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### **Spindle City Historic Society Membership Application**

[www.timesunion.com/communities/spindlecity](http://www.timesunion.com/communities/spindlecity)

[www.spindlecity.org](http://www.spindlecity.org)

President - Paul Dunleavy

First Vice President - Linda C. Christopher

Second Vice President - Daniele Cherniak

Secretary - Tor Shekerjian

Treasurer - June Cherniak

<input type="checkbox"/> Individual Membership	\$10.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Institutional Membership	\$25.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Senior Citizen Membership	\$ 5.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Contributing Membership	\$35.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Student Membership	\$ 5.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Membership	\$50.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Family Membership	\$15.00		

*We have great things planned in our home in the Cohoes Visitor's Center!*

*Please help if you can with an additional donation to support our upcoming programs:*

\$5.00     \$10.00     other

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP CODE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Mail completed form with membership fee, payable to Spindle City Historic Society, to:  
June Cherniak, Treasurer, 415 Vliet Boulevard, Cohoes, NY 12047

## ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

Thanks to Kaylen Thorpe for setting up our new website. Visit the site at [www.spindlecity.org](http://www.spindlecity.org)

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**WANTED** – Contributions to the Newsletter! If you have a story about people, places, or events in Cohoes history, we want to hear from you. The newsletter staff welcomes written articles, as well as information that could be used in newsletter articles. Contributors will be acknowledged. Please contact us at 237-5618 or 237-9146 if you have a story to share.

☪☪

**Saturday, March 12** - "Restoration and Renewal of Hydroelectric Projects on the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers" – a presentation by James Besha, President of the Albany Engineering Corporation. 1 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

**Wednesday, March 30** - Spindle City Historic Society monthly meeting, 7 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

**Saturday, April 9** - 18th century houses in Cohoes and the Town of Colonie. Presentation by Walter Wheeler. The program will show known examples of Dutch houses, photos of lost buildings and speculations regarding other standing structures that may date to the 18th century, with an overview of their unique characteristics. 1 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

**Wednesday, April 27** - Spindle City Historic Society monthly meeting, 7 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

**Saturday, April 30** - Third Annual Cohoes High School Art Show. Reception for the artists, their families, friends, and the public, 7 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center. This exhibit of work by Cohoes High School students will include drawings, paintings in watercolor, acrylic and oil, photographs, computer graphics, and sculptures. The high school a cappella group, the DCs, will perform at the reception. The show will be open to the public beginning **Tuesday, April 5**, during regular Visitor's Center hours, 11 a.m. to 4 a.m. Tuesday – Friday (11 a.m. - 3 p.m. on Friday, April 8). The show will be up through May.

**Wednesday, May 25** - Spindle City Historic Society monthly meeting, 7 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

**Wednesday, June 29** - Spindle City Historic Society monthly meeting, 7 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

*Photo credits this issue: Walter Cherniak, Tom Donnelly, Paul Dunleavy, Tor Shekerjian  
Editorial assistance: Tor Shekerjian*

☪ SCHS Newsletter Staff ☪

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Spindle City Historic Society

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